

Unknown Photographer (copyright: mil.ru). 2018. *Peresvet, laser weapon, in combat configuration.*^[18]



In February of 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine in a major escalation of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War. Russia used a new military technology, a laser-weapon named *Peresvet* (named after a 14th century warrior-monk and a 20th century battleship). See the above photograph.

While Russia claimed the *Peresvet* could physically destroy targets by thermal destruction—“they burn up”—it was mostly used to blind and dazzle (temporarily blind) the optical systems of aircraft, drones, satellites, and cruise missiles.^[19]

The alternative method for destroying satellites is to send orbital debris, called space junk, into the pathway of a satellite, causing catastrophic damage when it all collides. However, the international community has deemed this approach a potential “indiscriminate attack” on all spacefaring nations and considers it a violation of international law.^[20]

When the *Peresvet* blinded nearly all of Ukraine’s satellites and therefore concealed Russian military movements, several private companies in Europe and the US that had satellites above Ukraine offered real-time, actionable intelligence data to the Ukrainian government and military.^[21]

Persistent issues throughout history...

1. As it relates to international law, what similarities are there between:

- sea mines in the early 20th century and orbital debris in the early 21st century?
- a commercial vessel suspected of delivering contraband to a combatant in the early 20th century and a private company’s satellite suspected of providing information to a combatant in the early 21st century?

2. What should the consequences be for a belligerent (a nation at war) that destroys a private company’s satellite suspected of providing information to its opponent... why? Be sure to describe the different “sides” to this dilemma and which you think is stronger.

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19. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-touts-new-generation-blinding-laser-weapons-2022-05-18/>

20. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/when-elephants-fight-outer-space>

21. <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/ukraine-russia-satellites>